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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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TITLE: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR
 SENSING CARDIAC CONTRACTIONS
 DURING A MEDICAL PROCEDURE

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SENSING CARDIAC CONTRACTIONS DURING A MEDICAL PROCEDURE

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PRIORITY

This application claims priority as a divisional application to 09/669,335
10 filed on September 26, 2000.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to methods and systems for performing a medical
procedure, especially procedures during which it is necessary to adjust the
beating of the heart. More particularly, this invention relates to methods and
15 systems for sensing imminent cardiac contractions during such a procedure.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The current leading cause of death in the United States is coronary artery
disease in which the coronary arteries are blocked by atherosclerotic plaques or
deposits of fat. The typical treatment to relieve a partially or fully blocked
20 coronary artery is coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery.

CABG surgery, also known as "heart bypass" surgery, generally entails
using a graft to bypass the coronary obstruction. The procedure is generally
lengthy, traumatic and subject to patient risks. Among the risk factors involved is
the use of a cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) circuit, also known as a "heart-lung
25 machine", to pump blood and oxygenate the blood so that the patient's heart may
be stopped during the surgery.

Conventional CABG procedures are typically conducted on a stopped heart while the patient is on a CPB circuit. A stopped heart and a CPB circuit enables a surgeon to work in a bloodless, still operative field. However, there are a number of problems associated with CABG procedures performed while on CPB including the initiation of a systemic inflammatory response due to interactions of blood elements with the artificial material surfaces of the CPB circuit and global myocardial ischemia due to cardioplegic cardiac arrest. For these reasons, avoiding the use of CPB or cardioplegic cardiac arrest may help minimize post-operative complications.

One method, as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,651,378 to inventors Matheny and Taylor and in U.S. Patent No. 5,913,876 to inventors Taylor et al., for facilitating coronary bypass surgery on a beating heart and thereby avoid the use of CPB and cardioplegic cardiac arrest includes stimulating the vagal nerve electrically in order to temporarily stop or substantially reduce the beating of the heart. This may be followed by pacing the heart to start its beating.

Another method, as disclosed in two published PCT applications, WO 99/09971 and WO 99/09973, both to inventor Puskas, involves stopping the beating of the heart during coronary bypass surgery using electrical stimulation of the vagal nerve in combination with administration of drugs. Another method, as disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,060,454 to inventor Duhaylongsod, involves stopping the beating of the heart during coronary bypass surgery via the local delivery of drugs to the heart.

Although it is desirable to stop the heart for a period of time in order to allow the surgeon to accomplish a required task without interference from heart movement, i.e. a motionless operative field, it is undesirable to have the heart stopped for too long a period of time since the body needs, among other things, a constant supply of oxygen. In fact, it is particularly important to maintain sufficient blood flow, and therefore oxygen flow, to the brain. Stopping the heart for prolonged periods of time may cause damage to the patient.

Moreover, once stopped or still, the heart may still contract occasionally. This is sometimes referred to as an "escape beat." Such an "escape beat" may occur without any warning to the surgeon and the movement associated with the escape beat may interfere with the medical procedure being carried out.

It would be desirable therefore to provide a method for temporarily stopping or slowing the heart in order to control blood flow during a medical procedure.

It would further be desirable to provide a means for sensing an imminent cardiac contraction during the procedure.

It would further be desirable to provide a means for alerting the surgeon of an imminent contraction during the procedure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One aspect of the present invention provides a system for performing a medical procedure. The system includes a sensor to sense a state of a cardiac tissue and an indicator to indicate the state of the cardiac tissue.

The system may also include a nerve stimulator in communication with the sensor to inhibit beating of a heart when the state indicated by the indicator is a non-contracting state. The nerve stimulator may stimulate a nerve such as a vagal nerve, a carotid sinus nerve, a fat pad. The nerve stimulator may be, for example, one or more electrodes, such as nerve stimulation electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, intravascular electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, screw-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes, patch electrodes, cuff electrodes, clip electrodes, needle electrodes and probe electrodes.

The system may also include a cardiac stimulator in communication with the sensor to stimulate beating of a heart when the state indicated by the indicator is a contracting state. The cardiac stimulator may be, for example, one
5 or more electrodes, such as cardiac stimulation electrodes, clip electrodes, needle electrodes, probe electrodes, pacing electrodes, epicardial electrodes, patch electrodes, intravascular electrodes, balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes,
10 transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, screw-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes and cuff electrodes.

The sensor may be an electrical sensor, a chemical sensor, an electromagnetic interference sensor, an electrochemical sensor, a pressure
15 sensor, a sound wave sensor, a magnetic sensor, an ultraviolet sensor, a visible light sensor, an infrared sensor, a radiation sensor, a flow sensor, a temperature sensor, a gas sensor, an optical sensor, a pH sensor, a potentiometric sensor, a fluorescence sensor, a depolarization sensor and a biosensor. The sensor may also comprise one or more electrodes, such as cardiac stimulation electrodes,
20 clip electrodes, needle electrodes, probe electrodes, pacing electrodes, epicardial electrodes, patch electrodes, intravascular electrodes, balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, screw-type
25 electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes and cuff electrodes. The sensor and the cardiac stimulator may be the same.

The system may also include drug delivery means such as a spray, a cream, an ointment, a medicament, a pill, a patch, a catheter, a cannula, a needle and syringe, a pump, and an iontophoretic drug delivery device to deliver at least one drug during the procedure. The drug may be a beta-blocker, a cholinergic agent, a cholinesterase inhibitor, a calcium channel blocker, a sodium channel blocker, a potassium channel agent, adenosine, an adenosine receptor agonist, an adenosine deaminase inhibitor, dipyridamole, a monoamine oxidase inhibitor, digoxin, digitalis, lignocaine, a bradykinin agent, a serotonergic agonist, an antiarrhythmic agent, a cardiac glycoside, a local anesthetic, atropine, a calcium solution, an agent that promotes heart rate, an agent that promotes heart contractions, dopamine, a catecholamine, an inotrope glucagon, a hormone, forskolin, epinephrine, norepinephrine, thyroid hormone, a phosphodiesterase inhibitor, prostacyclin, prostaglandin and a methylxanthine.

The drug may be naturally occurring or chemically synthesized.

The system may also include a breathing regulator, which may control a respirator. The breathing regulator may stimulate a phrenic nerve. The breathing regulator may be, for example, one or more electrodes such as nerve stimulation electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, intravascular electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, screw-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes, patch electrodes, cuff electrodes, clip electrodes, needle electrodes and probe electrodes.

The medical procedure may be a surgical procedure, a non-surgical procedure, a fluoroscopic procedure, a cardiac procedure, a vascular procedure, a neurosurgical procedure, an electrophysiological procedure, a diagnostic
5 procedure, a therapeutic procedure, an ablation procedure, an endovascular procedure, a liver procedure, a spleen procedure, a pulmonary procedure, an aneurysm repair, an imaging procedure, a CAT scan procedure, a MRI procedure, a pharmacological therapy, a drug delivery procedure, a biological delivery procedure, a genetic therapy, a cellular therapy, a cancer therapy,
10 a radiation therapy, a transplantation procedure, a coronary angioplasty procedure, a stent delivery procedure, an atherectomy procedure, a procedure that requires precise control of cardiac motion, a procedure that requires precise control of bleeding, a non-invasive procedure, a minimally invasive procedure, an invasive procedure, a port-access procedure, an endoscopic procedure,
15 a sternotomy procedure, a thoracotomy procedure and a robotic procedure.

Another aspect of the present invention provides a method for performing a medical procedure. Beating of a heart is inhibited. The medical procedure is performed and a state of cardiac tissue is sensed while beating of the heart is inhibited. The beating of the heart may be inhibited automatically when the state
20 of cardiac tissue is a non-contracting state. A nerve may also be stimulated to inhibit beating of the heart when the state of cardiac tissue is a non-contracting state. Stimulation of the nerve may be stopped when the state of cardiac contraction is a contracting state. Beating of the heart may be allowed to occur when the state of cardiac tissue is a contracting state. Beating of the heart may
25 also be stimulated automatically when the state of cardiac tissue is a contracting state. At least one drug may be delivered during the medical procedure. Breathing may be stopped when the state of cardiac tissue is a non-contracting state.

Another aspect of the present invention provides a device for performing a medical procedure. The device includes a processor, a sensor to sense a state of cardiac tissue at least one nerve stimulation electrode. The processor
5 receives a signal from the sensor and adjusts output from the nerve stimulation electrode in response to the signal. The sensor may be an electrical sensor, a chemical sensor, an electromagnetic interference sensor, an electrochemical sensor, a pressure sensor, a sound wave sensor, a magnetic sensor, an ultraviolet sensor, a visible light sensor, an infrared sensor, a radiation sensor, a
10 flow sensor, a temperature sensor, a gas sensor, an optical sensor, a pH sensor, a potentiometric sensor, a fluorescence sensor, a depolarization sensor and a biosensor. The nerve stimulation electrode may be, for example, one or more electrodes such as endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, intravascular electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes,
15 balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, screw-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes, patch electrodes, cuff electrodes, clip electrodes, needle electrodes and probe electrodes.

20 The device may also include at least one cardiac stimulation electrode to stimulate beating of the heart. The processor receives a signal from the sensor and adjusts output from the cardiac stimulation electrode in response to the signal. The cardiac stimulation electrode may be, for example, one or more electrodes such as clip electrodes, needle electrodes, probe electrodes, pacing
25 electrodes, epicardial electrodes, patch electrodes, intravascular electrodes, balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, screw-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes,
30 monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes and cuff electrodes. The cardiac stimulation electrode and the sensor may be the same.

The device may also include at least one breathing regulation electrode for controlling breathing. The processor adjusts the output from the breathing regulation electrode in response to the signal. The breathing electrode may be,
5 for example, one or more electrodes, such as nerve stimulation electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, intravascular electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, balloon-type electrodes, basket-type electrodes, umbrella-type electrodes, suction-type electrodes, screw-type electrodes, tape-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar
10 electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes, patch electrodes, cuff electrodes, clip electrodes, needle electrodes and probe electrodes.

The device may also include a drug pump for delivering at least one drug. The processor adjusts the output of the drug.

15 The foregoing, and other, features and advantages of the invention will become further apparent from the following detailed description of the presently preferred embodiments, read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. The detailed description and drawings are merely illustrative of the invention rather than limiting, the scope of the invention being defined by the appended
20 claims in equivalence thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic view of one embodiment of a system for sensing imminent cardiac contractions during a medical procedure in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a schematic view of one embodiment of a medical device in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram of one embodiment of a method of performing a medical procedure in accordance with the present invention; and

FIG. 4 is a timeline view of one embodiment of a system for sensing imminent cardiac contractions during a medical procedure in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENTLY PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 shows a schematic view of one embodiment of a system for performing a medical procedure in accordance with the present invention at **100**. System **100** comprises a cardiac contraction sensor **6**, a nerve stimulator **10**, and a cardiac stimulator **20**. System **100** may also feature a controller **30** and a breathing regulator **40**.

FIG. 2 shows one embodiment of the present invention at **200**. In this embodiment, the elements named above may be combined or connected to a control unit along with other components. The unit **200** may be used to coordinate the various elements.

Cardiac contraction sensor **6** may be any suitable sensor, e.g., an electrical sensor, a chemical sensor or a biosensor, for detecting one or more signals indicative of a cardiac contraction or heartbeat. In one embodiment, as seen in **FIG. 2**, cardiac contraction sensor **6** may also comprise a sensor **206** incorporated with a control unit **200**.

In one embodiment, as shown in **FIG. 2**, sensor **206** may be a monitor for mounting on or near the heart during surgery. Such a monitor may monitor the electrical activity of the heart by picking up and amplifying electrical signals from the heart and displaying an output. For example, the output may be displayed on display **216**. The surgeon may check this output periodically to see if the output reaches a level that indicates an escape beat is probable. Alternatively, the monitor may be programmed to indicate by a signal, such as an audio or visual signal, that the electrical activity has reached a predetermined level that is indicative of an imminent escape beat.

Cardiac contraction sensor **6** may also be a sensor that detects cardiac depolarizations. The electrical signal generated by the sinus node of the heart causes the atria to contract to force blood into the ventricles. After a brief delay, the ventricles contract to force blood out through the body. The contraction of the ventricles is reflected by the passage of a depolarization wavefront through the heart muscle. If a depolarization is sensed, an escape beat is likely to occur. One such depolarization sensor is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,156,149 entitled "Sensor for Detecting Cardiac Depolarizations Particularly Adapted for use in a Cardiac Pacemaker", October 2, 1992, to inventor Hudrlik. This patent is assigned to Medtronic, Inc. and is incorporated herein by reference.

Cardiac contraction sensor **6** may also be coupled to cardiac stimulator **20**. Such a sensor may detect the response of tissue near the stimulator **20**. If the tissue is stimulated during the procedure by stimulator **20**, the cardiac stimulation may cause an escape beat even after stimulation has been reduced or stopped, particularly if cardiac stimulation is only reduced during the procedure rather than fully stopped. One such detector is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,265,603 entitled "Electronic Capture Detection for a Pacer," November 30, 1993, to inventor Hudrlik. This patent is assigned to Medtronic, Inc. and is incorporated herein by reference.

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Cardiac contraction sensor **6** may be an apparatus that senses power levels of depolarizations in heart tissue. Such a sensor may be used to distinguish between normally conducted and ectopic heart beats while the heart is beating or may be used to sense an imminent heart beat while the heart is slowed or substantially stilled during a medical procedure. One apparatus that may serve as such a sensor is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,411,529 entitled "Waveform Discriminator for Cardiac Stimulation Devices", May 2, 1995, to inventor Hurdlik. This patent is assigned to Medtronic, Inc. and is incorporated herein by reference.

Other suitable sensors may also serve as cardiac contraction sensor **6**.

All or a portion of cardiac contraction sensor **6** may be placed in any suitable manner for sensing an imminent cardiac contraction. For example, sensor **206** may incorporate a lead as shown at **226**, which may be used to attach the sensor to the heart. The lead may also be used to monitor electrical signals of the heart as described above. Sensor **206** may be placed in any suitable area of the heart. For example, sensor **206** may be placed near the location of the cardiac stimulator **220** as described above. Sensor **206** may be placed near the right ventricle, the left ventricle, the right atrium, or the left atrium. Other suitable placements of the sensor **206** may be possible. The sensor's optimal location will depend primarily on the sensor's mode of operation.

As indicated above, sensor **206** and/or control unit **200** may be incorporated into system **100**. System **100** may also include a nerve stimulator **10**. In one embodiment, the nerve stimulator **10** may be used to electrically manipulate cardiac rhythm by stimulating the vagus nerve. This vagal stimulation may produce asystole (slowing or stopping of the heart's beating.) Once this induced asystole is stopped, i.e. once the vagal stimulation is stopped, the heart may be allowed to return to its usual cardiac rhythm. Alternatively, the heart may be paced with an electrical pacing system, thereby maintaining a normal cardiac

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output. Vagal stimulation, alone or in combination with electrical pacing, may be used selectively and intermittently to allow a surgeon to perform a medical procedure during intermittent periods of asystole.

5 It is known that stimulation of the vagus nerve can reduce the sinus rate, as well as prolong AV conduction time or, if stimulation energies are high enough, induce AV node block. Use of vagal nerve stimulation to treat supraventricular arrhythmias and angina pectoris is disclosed in the article "Vagal Tuning" by Bilgutay et al., Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery, Vol. 10 56, No. 1, July, 1968, pp. 71-82. It is also known that stimulation of the carotid sinus nerve produces a similar result, as disclosed in the article "Carotid Sinus Nerve Stimulation in the Treatment of Angina Pectoris and Supraventricular Tachycardia" by Braunwald et al., published in California Medicine, Vol. 112, pp. 41-50, March, 1970.

15 As set forth in "Functional Anatomy of the Cardiac Efferent Innervation" by Randall et al., in Neurocardiology, edited by Kulbertus et al, Futura Publishing Co., 1988, direct surgical excision of the fat pad associated with the SA node affects the functioning of the SA node without significantly affecting the AV node. Similarly, excision of the fat pad associated with the AV node affects functioning 20 of the AV node without significantly affecting the SA node.

 As set forth in the article "Parasympathetic Postganglionic Pathways to the Sinoatrial Node," Bluemel et al., Am. J. Physiol. 259, (Heart Circ. Physiol. 28) H1504-H1510, 1990, stimulation of the fat pad associated with the SA node results in slowing of the sinus rate without the accompanying prolongation of AV 25 conduction time which normally results from vagal nerve stimulation. The article also indicates that stimulation of the fat pad associated with the AV node is believed to produce corresponding effects limited to the AV node, i.e., extension of the AV conduction time without concurrent slowing of the sinus rate.

As set forth in the article "Neural Effects on Sinus Rate and Atrial Ventricular Conduction Produced by Electrical Stimulation From a Transvenous Electrode Catheter in the Canine Right Pulmonary Artery" by Cooper et al.,

5 published in Circulation Research, Vol. 46, No. 1, January, 1980, pp. 48-57, the fat pads associated with both the AV node and the SA node may be stimulated by means of electrodes located in the right pulmonary artery. The results obtained include both a depression of the sinus rate and a prolongation of the AV conduction time in response to continuous stimulation at 2-80 Hz at up to 50 ma.

10 Generally in healthy individuals, the SA node functions as the pacemaker. Normal heart rhythm associated with the SA node is typically referred to as sinus rhythm. When the SA node fails, the AV node generally takes over creating a heart rate of approximately 35 to 60 beats per minute. Heart rhythm associated with the AV node is typically referred to as nodal rhythm. When the AV node
15 itself is blocked or injured, a new even slower pacemaker site may form at the junction of the AV node and the His bundle. Heart rhythm associated with this junction is typically referred to as junctional escape rhythm. When this junction site is inhibited, the Purkinje fibers in the His bundle or below may act as a pacemaker creating a heart rate of approximately 30 beats per minute. Heart
20 rhythm associated with the Purkinje fibers is typically referred to as idioventricular rhythm.

In one embodiment of the present invention, nerve stimulator **10** may be used to electrically manipulate cardiac rhythm by stimulating the carotid sinus nerve, the fat pad associated with the SA node, the fat pad associated with the
25 AV node, the junction of the AV node and the His bundle and/or the Purkinje fibers.

In one embodiment of the present invention, nerve stimulator **10** is used alone or in combination with other heart rate inhibiting agents to temporarily stop or slow the beating heart, thereby eliminating or reducing heart motion and/or blood flow during a medical procedure. For example, the present invention may be used to eliminate or reduce motion in the anastomosis field during CABG procedures such that a facilitated anastomosis procedure may be performed safely and effectively. The number of occasions that the vagal nerve may be stimulated depends on the type of medical procedure to be performed. Likewise, the type of medical procedure to be performed will dictate the duration of the individual electrical stimulations.

Nerve stimulator **10** may be powered by AC current, DC current or it may be battery powered by a disposable or re-chargeable battery. Nerve stimulator **10** may be configured to synchronize activation and deactivation of breathing regulator **40** with vagal stimulation, thereby minimizing or eliminating unwanted heart and chest motion associated with the patient's breathing. Nerve stimulator **10** may comprise a surgeon controlled switch box. A switch may be incorporated in or on one of the surgeon's instruments, such as surgical site retractor, or any other location easily and quickly accessed by the surgeon for regulation of the nerve stimulator **10** by the surgeon. The switch may be, for example, a hand switch, a foot switch, or a voice-activated switch comprising voice-recognition technologies.

A visual and/or audible signal used to alert a surgeon to the completion or resumption of vagal nerve stimulation may be incorporated into nerve stimulator **10**. For example, a beeping tone or flashing light that increases in frequency as the nerve stimulation period should end or begin may be used.

Nerve stimulator **10** may be slaved to cardiac stimulator **20** or cardiac stimulator **20** may be slaved to nerve stimulator **10**. For example, the output of cardiac stimulator **20** may be off whenever the output of nerve stimulator **10** is on. Software controlling cardiac stimulator **20** may be designed to automatically commence cardiac pacing if the heart does not resume beating within a pre-determined interval after cessation of vagal nerve stimulation. In addition, the software controlling nerve stimulator **10** may be designed to automatically stop vagal nerve stimulation if the heart has been stopped for too long.

System **100** may also include cardiac stimulator **20** which may be used to stimulate the heart as desired. As with nerve stimulator **10**, cardiac stimulator **20** may be intermittently stopped and started to allow the surgeon to perform individual steps of a medical procedure.

Cardiac stimulator **20** may be a conventional ventricular demand pacer or dual chamber (atrial-ventricular) pacer. Cardiac stimulator **20** may be powered by AC current, DC current or it may be battery powered by a disposable or re-chargeable battery. Cardiac stimulator **20** may be configured to synchronize activation and deactivation of breathing regulator **40** with pacing, thereby minimizing or eliminating unwanted heart and chest motion associated with the patient's breathing. Cardiac stimulator **20** may be any conventional pacing device suitable for ventricular demand pacing and having leads electrically coupled to a switch box. Cardiac stimulator **20** may be combined in a single unit with a switch box. Cardiac stimulator **20** may comprise a surgeon controlled switch box. A switch may be incorporated in or on one of the surgeon's instruments, such as surgical site retractor, or any other location easily and quickly accessed by the surgeon for regulation of the cardiac stimulator by the surgeon. The switch may be, for example, a hand switch, a foot switch, or a voice-activated switch comprising voice-recognition technologies. A single switch may be used to regulate both cardiac stimulator **20** and nerve stimulator **10**.

A visual and/or audible signal used to prepare a surgeon for the resumption of pacing may be incorporated into cardiac stimulator **20**. For example, a beeping tone or flashing light that increases in frequency as the
5 pacing period ends may be used. A single signaling method or device may be used for both cardiac stimulator **20** and nerve stimulator **10**.

Sensor **6**, nerve stimulator **10** and/or cardiac stimulator **20** may be slaved to a robotic system or a robotic system may be slaved to sensor **6**, nerve
10 stimulator **10** and/or cardiac stimulator **20**. Breathing regulator **40** and other components may also be slaved to such a system. Computer and voice-controlled robotic systems that position and maneuver endoscopes and/or other surgical instruments for performing microsurgical procedures such as anastomoses through small incisions may be used by a surgeon to perform precise and delicate maneuvers. These robotic systems may allow a surgeon to
15 perform a variety of microsurgical procedures including endoscopic CABG. Endoscopic CABG may allow multiple occluded coronary arteries to be bypassed without a thoracotomy or mini-thoracotomy. Heart valve repair and replacement may also be other surgical applications for these robotic systems. In general, robotic systems may include head-mounted displays that integrate 3-D
20 visualization of surgical anatomy and related diagnostic and monitoring data, miniature high-resolution 2-D and 3-D digital cameras, a computer, a high power light source and a standard video monitor.

System **100** may also include a breathing regulator **40**. In one embodiment, the breathing regulator **40** may be used to stimulate the phrenic
25 nerve in order to provide a diaphragmatic pacemaker. Breathing regulator **40** may comprise one or more electrodes for supplying electrical current to the phrenic nerve to control breathing during vagal and/or cardiac stimulation and/or destimulation. Electrodes used to stimulate the phrenic nerve may be, for example, non-invasive, e.g., clips, or invasive, e.g., needles or probes. The
30 application of an electrical stimulus to the phrenic nerve may include, but is not

limited to bipolar and/or monopolar techniques. Different electrode positions are accessible through various access openings, for example, in the cervical or thorax regions. Nerve stimulation electrodes may be positioned through a
5 thoracotomy, sternotomy, endoscopically through a percutaneous port, through a stab wound or puncture, through a small incision, placed on the skin or in combinations thereof. The present invention may include various electrodes, catheters and electrode catheters suitable for phrenic nerve stimulation to control breathing.

10 Phrenic nerve stimulation electrodes may be intravascular, patch-type, balloon-type, basket-type, umbrella-type, tape-type, cuff-type, suction-type, screw-type, barb-type, bipolar, monopolar, metal, wire, endotracheal, endoesophageal, intravascular, transcutaneous or intracutaneous electrodes. Guided or steerable catheter devices comprising electrodes may be used alone
15 or in combination with the nerve stimulation electrodes. For example, a catheter comprising one or more wire, metal strips or metal foil electrodes or electrode arrays may be used. The catheter may comprise, for example, a balloon, which may be inflated with air, or liquid to press the electrodes firmly against a vessel wall that lays adjacent the phrenic nerve.

20 Phrenic nerve stimulation electrodes may be oriented in any fashion along the catheter device, including longitudinally or transversely. Various techniques such as ultrasound, fluoroscopy and echocardiography may be used to facilitate positioning of the electrodes. If desired or necessary, avoidance of obstruction of blood flow may be achieved with notched catheter designs or with catheters
25 which incorporate one or more tunnels or passageways.

In another embodiment, the breathing regulator **40** may comprise a connector which interfaces with a patient's respirator, and sends a logic signal to activate or deactivate the respirator to control breathing during vagal and/or cardiac stimulation and/or destimulation.

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As indicated above, **FIG. 2** shows one embodiment of the present invention at **200**. In this embodiment, the elements named above may be combined or connected to a control unit along with other components. The unit
5 **200** may be used to coordinate the various elements. Unit **200** may incorporate a controller or any suitable processor **230**.

Unit **200** may incorporate a cardiac contraction sensor **206** as described above. As seen in **FIG. 2**, the sensor **206** may be or may incorporate one or more sensing electrodes **226**. Such an electrode may also be attached to a
10 display component **216**. Sensing electrodes **226** incorporated with sensor **206** may be, for example, non-invasive, e.g., clips, or invasive, e.g., needles or probes. Electrodes **226** may be positioned through a thoracotomy, sternotomy, endoscopically through a percutaneous port, through a stab wound or puncture, through a small incision in the chest, placed on the chest or in combinations
15 thereof. The present invention may also use various electrodes, catheters and electrode catheters suitable for pacing the heart, e.g., epicardial, patch-type, intravascular, balloon-type, basket-type, umbrella-type, tape-type, transcutaneous, intracutaneous, screw-type, barb-type, bipolar, monopolar, metal, wire, cuff-type or suction-type. Guided or steerable catheter devices
20 comprising electrodes may be used alone or in combination with the electrodes. Although **FIG. 2** shows a separate sensor **206** and cardiac stimulator **220**, one sensing/stimulating electrode may serve both functions in one embodiment of the invention.

Unit **200** may also incorporate a separate cardiac stimulator and sensing
25 electrode. For example, **FIG. 2** shows an electrode for stimulation of the heart at **220** separate from sensing electrode **226**. Cardiac electrodes **220** used to stimulate the heart may be, for example, non-invasive, e.g., clips, or invasive, e.g., needles or probes. Electrodes **220** may be positioned through a thoracotomy, sternotomy, endoscopically through a percutaneous port, through a
30 stab wound or puncture, through a small incision in the chest, placed on the

chest or in combinations thereof. The present invention may also use various electrodes, catheters and electrode catheters suitable for pacing the heart, e.g., epicardial, patch-type, intravascular, balloon-type, basket-type, umbrella-type, tape-type electrodes, suction-type, pacing electrodes, endotracheal electrodes, endoesophageal electrodes, transcutaneous electrodes, intracutaneous electrodes, screw-type electrodes, barb-type electrodes, bipolar electrodes, monopolar electrodes, metal electrodes, wire electrodes and cuff electrodes. Guided or steerable catheter devices comprising electrodes may be used alone or in combination with the electrodes.

Unit **200** may also incorporate a nerve stimulator. For example, **FIG. 2** shows an electrode for nerve stimulation at **210**. Electrodes used to stimulate a nerve such as the vagal nerve may be, for example, non-invasive, e.g., clips, or invasive, e.g., needles or probes. The application of an electrical stimulus to the right or left vagal nerve may include, but is not limited to bipolar and/or monopolar techniques. Different electrode positions are accessible through various access openings, for example, in the cervical or thorax regions. Nerve stimulation electrodes **210** may be positioned through a thoracotomy, sternotomy, endoscopically through a percutaneous port, through a stab wound or puncture, through a small incision in the neck or chest, through the internal jugular vein, the esophagus, the trachea, placed on the skin or in combinations thereof. Electrical stimulation may be carried out on the right vagal nerve, the left vagal nerve or to both nerves simultaneously or sequentially. The present invention may include various electrodes, catheters and electrode catheters suitable for vagal nerve stimulation to temporarily stop or slow the beating heart alone or in combination with other heart rate inhibiting agents.

Nerve stimulation electrodes **210** may be endotracheal, endoesophageal, intravascular, transcutaneous, intracutaneous, patch-type, balloon-type, cuff-type, basket-type, umbrella-type, tape-type, screw-type, barb-type, metal, wire or suction-type electrodes. Guided or steerable catheter devices comprising electrodes may be used alone or in combination with the nerve stimulation electrodes **210**. For example, a catheter comprising one or more wire, metal strips or metal foil electrodes or electrode arrays may be inserted into the internal jugular vein to make electrical contact with the wall of the internal jugular vein, and thus stimulate the vagal nerve adjacent to the internal jugular vein. Access to the internal jugular vein may be via, for example, the right atrium, the right atrial appendage, the inferior vena cava or the superior vena cava. The catheter may comprise, for example, a balloon, which may be inflated with air or liquid to press the electrodes firmly against the vessel wall. Similar techniques may be performed by insertion of a catheter-type device into the trachea or esophagus. Additionally, tracheal tubes and esophageal tubes comprising electrodes may be used.

Nerve stimulation electrodes **210** may be oriented in any fashion along the catheter device, including longitudinally or transversely. Various techniques such as ultrasound, fluoroscopy and echocardiography may be used to facilitate positioning of the electrodes. If desired or necessary, avoidance of obstruction of blood flow may be achieved with notched catheter designs or with catheters which incorporate one or more tunnels or passageways.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the location of the electrodes **210** is chosen to elicit maximum bradycardia effectiveness while minimizing current spread to adjacent tissues and vessels and to prevent the induction of post stimulation tachycardia. Furthermore, a non-conductive material such as plastic may be employed to sufficiently enclose the electrodes of all the configurations to shield them from the surrounding tissues and vessels, while exposing their confronting edges and surfaces for positive contact with the vagal nerve or selected tissues.

Controller **230** may be used to gather information from nerve stimulation electrodes **210** and cardiac stimulation electrodes **220**. Controller **230** may also be used to control the stimulation levels and stimulation duration from nerve stimulation electrodes **210** and cardiac stimulation electrodes **220**. Controller **230** may also gather and process information from sensor **206**. This information may be used to adjust stimulation levels and stimulation times from nerve stimulation electrodes **210** and cardiac stimulation electrodes **220**.

Unit **200** may incorporate one or more switches to facilitate regulation of the various components by the surgeon. One example of such a switch is shown as foot pedal **250**. The switch may also be, for example, a hand switch, or a voice-activated switch comprising voice-recognition technologies. The switch may be incorporated in or on one of the surgeon's instruments, such as surgical site retractor, or any other location easily and quickly accessed by the surgeon.

Unit **200** may also include a display **260**. Unit **200** may also include other means of indicating the status of various components to the surgeon such as a numerical display, gauges, a monitor display or audio feedback. Unit **200** may also include one or more visual and/or audible signals used to prepare a surgeon for the start or stop of nerve stimulation and/or cardiac stimulation.

FIG. 3 shows a flow diagram of one embodiment of the present invention. The patient is prepared for a medical procedure at **500**. In one embodiment of the invention, the patient's initial heart rate may be measured (Block **505**). This initial reading is then used as a gauge to compare with the electrical signals detected by sensor **6** during the procedure. In one embodiment, the sensor alerts the surgeon if the sensed electrical (or depolarization) signals reach a predetermined level.

At Block **510**, a nerve that controls the beating of the heart is stimulated. Such a nerve may be for example a vagal nerve. At Block **510**, one or more of a variety of pharmacological agents or drugs may be delivered. These drugs may produce reversible asystole of a heart while maintaining the ability of the heart to be electrically paced.

A variety of pharmacological agents or drugs may also be delivered at other times during the procedure 500. These drugs may also produce reversible asystole of a heart while maintaining the ability of the heart to be electrically
5 paced. Other drugs may be administered for a variety of functions and purposes as described below. Drugs may be delivered at any appropriate time during the medical procedure, for example, at the beginning of the procedure, intermittently during the procedure, continuously during the procedure or following the procedure.

10 Drugs, drug formulations or compositions suitable for administration to a patient during a medical procedure may include a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or solution in an appropriate dosage. There are a number of pharmaceutically acceptable carriers that may be used for delivery of various drugs, for example, via direct injection, oral delivery, suppository delivery,
15 transdermal delivery, epicardial delivery and/or inhalation delivery. Pharmaceutically acceptable carriers include a number of solutions, preferably sterile, for example, water, saline, Ringer's solution and/or sugar solutions such as dextrose in water or saline. Other possible carriers that may be used include sodium citrate, citric acid, amino acids, lactate, mannitol, maltose, glycerol,
20 sucrose, ammonium chloride, sodium chloride, potassium chloride, calcium chloride, sodium lactate, and/or sodium bicarbonate. Carrier solutions may or may not be buffered.

Drug formulations or compositions may include antioxidants or preservatives such as ascorbic acid. They may also be in a pharmaceutically
25 acceptable form for parenteral administration, for example to the cardiovascular system, or directly to the heart, such as intracoronary infusion or injection. Drug formulations or compositions may comprise agents that provide a synergistic effect when administered together. A synergistic effect between two or more drugs or agents may reduce the amount that normally is required for therapeutic
30 delivery of an individual drug or agent. Two or more drugs may be administered,

for example, sequentially or simultaneously. Drugs may be administered via one or more bolus injections and/or infusions or combinations thereof. The injections and/or infusions may be continuous or intermittent. Drugs may be administered, 5 for example, systemically or locally, for example, to the heart, to a coronary artery and/or vein, to a pulmonary artery and/or vein, to the right atrium and/or ventricle, to the left atrium and/or ventricle, to the aorta, to the AV node, to the SA node, to a nerve and/or to the coronary sinus. Drugs may be administered or delivered via intravenous, intracoronary and/or intraventricular administration in a 10 suitable carrier. Examples of arteries that may be used to deliver drugs to the AV node include the AV node artery, the right coronary artery, the right descending coronary artery, the left coronary artery, the left anterior descending coronary artery and Kugel's artery. Drugs may be delivered systemically, for example, via oral, transdermal, intranasal, suppository or inhalation methods. Drugs also may 15 be delivered via a pill, a spray, a cream, an ointment or a medicament formulation.

Drugs may be delivered via a drug delivery device that may comprise a catheter, such as a drug delivery catheter or a guide catheter, a patch, such as a transepical patch that slowly releases drugs directly into the myocardium, a 20 cannula, a pump and/or a hypodermic needle and syringe assembly. A drug delivery catheter may include an expandable member, e.g., a low-pressure balloon, and a shaft having a distal portion, wherein the expandable member is disposed along the distal portion. A catheter for drug delivery may comprise one or more lumens and may be delivered endovascularly via insertion into a blood 25 vessel, e.g., an artery such as a femoral, radial, subclavian or coronary artery. The catheter can be guided into a desired position using various guidance techniques, e.g., fluoroscopic guidance and/or a guiding catheter or guide wire techniques.

Drugs may be delivered via an iontophoretic drug delivery device placed on the heart. In general, the delivery of ionized drugs may be enhanced via a small current applied across two electrodes. Positive ions may be introduced
5 into the tissues from the positive pole, or negative ions from the negative pole. The use of iontophoresis may markedly facilitate the transport of certain ionized drug molecules. For example, lidocaine hydrochloride may be applied to the heart via a drug patch comprising the drug. A positive electrode could be placed over the patch and current passed. The negative electrode would contact the
10 heart or other body part at some desired distance point to complete the circuit. One or more of the electrodes may also be used as nerve stimulation electrodes **210**, as cardiac stimulation electrodes **220** or as sensing electrodes **226**.

The two divisions of the autonomic nervous system that regulate the heart have opposite functions. First, the adrenergic or sympathetic nervous system
15 increases heart rate by releasing epinephrine and norepinephrine. Second, the parasympathetic system also known as the cholinergic nervous system or the vagal nervous system decreases heart rate by releasing acetylcholine. Catecholamines such as norepinephrine (also called noradrenaline) and epinephrine (also called adrenaline) are agonists for beta-adrenergic receptors.
20 An agonist is a stimulant biomolecule or agent that binds to a receptor.

Beta-adrenergic receptor blocking agents compete with beta-adrenergic receptor stimulating agents for available beta-receptor sites. When access to beta-receptor sites are blocked by receptor blocking agents, also known as beta-adrenergic blockade, the chronotropic or heart rate, inotropic or contractility, and
25 vasodilator responses to receptor stimulating agents are decreased proportionately. Therefore, beta-adrenergic receptor blocking agents are agents that are capable of blocking beta-adrenergic receptor sites.

Since beta-adrenergic receptors are concerned with contractility and heart rate, stimulation of beta-adrenergic receptors, in general, increases heart rate,
30 the contractility of the heart and the rate of conduction of electrical impulses through the AV node and the conduction system.

Drugs, drug formulations and/or drug compositions that may be used according to this invention may include any naturally occurring or chemically synthesized (synthetic analogues) beta-adrenergic receptor blocking agents.

- 5 Beta-adrenergic receptor blocking agents or α -adrenergic blocking agents are also known as beta-blockers or α -blockers and as class II antiarrhythmics.

The term "beta-blocker" appearing herein may refer to one or more agents that antagonize the effects of beta-stimulating catecholamines by blocking the catecholamines from binding to the beta-receptors. Examples of beta-blockers
10 include, but are not limited to, acebutolol, alprenolol, atenolol, betantolol, betaxolol, bevantolol, bisoprolol, carterolol, celiprolol, chlorthalidone, esmolol, labetalol, metoprolol, nadolol, penbutolol, pindolol, propranolol, oxprenolol, sotalol, teratolo, timolol and combinations, mixtures and/or salts thereof.

The effects of administered beta-blockers may be reversed by
15 administration of beta-receptor agonists, e.g., dobutamine or isoproterenol.

The parasympathetic or cholinergic system participates in control of heart rate via the sinoatrial (SA) node, where it reduces heart rate. Other cholinergic effects include inhibition of the AV node and an inhibitory effect on contractile force. The cholinergic system acts through the vagal nerve to release
20 acetylcholine, which, in turn, stimulates cholinergic receptors. Cholinergic receptors are also known as muscarinic receptors. Stimulation of the cholinergic receptors decreases the formation of cAMP. Stimulation of cholinergic receptors generally has an opposite effect on heart rate compared to stimulation of beta-adrenergic receptors. For example, beta-adrenergic stimulation increases heart
25 rate, whereas cholinergic stimulation decreases it. When vagal tone is high and adrenergic tone is low, there is a marked slowing of the heart (sinus bradycardia). Acetylcholine effectively reduces the amplitude, rate of increase and duration of the SA node action potential. During vagal nerve stimulation, the SA node does not arrest. Rather, pacemaker function may shift

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to cells that fire at a slower rate. In addition, acetylcholine may help open certain potassium channels thereby creating an outward flow of potassium ions and hyperpolarization. Acetylcholine also slows conduction through the AV node.

5 Drugs, drug formulations and/or drug compositions that may be used according to this invention may include any naturally occurring or chemically synthesized (synthetic analogues) cholinergic agent. The term "cholinergic agent" appearing herein may refer to one or more cholinergic receptor modulators or agonists. Examples of cholinergic agents include, but are not
10 limited to, acetylcholine, carbachol (carbamyl choline chloride), bethanechol, methacholine, arecoline, norarecoline and combinations, mixtures and/or salts thereof.

 Drugs, drug formulations and/or drug compositions that may be used according to this invention may include any naturally occurring or chemically
15 synthesized cholinesterase inhibitor. The term "cholinesterase inhibitor" appearing herein may refer to one or more agents that prolong the action of acetylcholine by inhibiting its destruction or hydrolysis by cholinesterase. Cholinesterase inhibitors are also known as acetylcholinesterase inhibitors. Examples of cholinesterase inhibitors include, but are not limited to,
20 edrophonium, neostigmine, neostigmine methylsulfate, pyridostigmine, tacrine and combinations, mixtures and/or salts thereof.

 There are ion-selective channels within certain cell membranes. These ion selective channels include calcium channels, sodium channels and/or potassium channels. Therefore, other drugs, drug formulations and/or drug
25 compositions that may be used according to this invention may include any naturally occurring or chemically synthesized calcium channel blocker. Calcium channel blockers inhibit the inward flux of calcium ions across cell membranes of arterial smooth muscle cells and myocardial cells. Therefore, the term "calcium channel blocker" appearing herein may refer to one or more agents that inhibit or
30 block the flow of calcium ions across a cell membrane. The calcium channel is

generally concerned with the triggering of the contractile cycle. Calcium channel blockers are also known as calcium ion influx inhibitors, slow channel blockers, calcium ion antagonists, calcium channel antagonist drugs and as class IV
5 antiarrhythmics. A commonly used calcium channel blocker is verapamil.

Administration of a calcium channel blocker, e.g., verapamil, generally prolongs the effective refractory period within the AV node and slows AV conduction in a rate-related manner, since the electrical activity through the AV node depends significantly upon the influx of calcium ions through the slow
10 channel. A calcium channel blocker has the ability to slow a patient's heart rate, as well as produce AV block. Examples of calcium channel blockers include, but are not limited to, amiloride, amlodipine, bepridil, diltiazem, felodipine, isradipine, mibefradil, nicardipine, nifedipine (dihydropyridines), nickel, nimodipine, nisoldipine, nitric oxide (NO), norverapamil and verapamil and combinations,
15 mixtures and/or salts thereof. Verapamil and diltiazem are very effective at inhibiting the AV node, whereas drugs of the nifedipine family have a lesser inhibitory effect on the AV node. Nitric oxide (NO) indirectly promotes calcium channel closure. NO may be used to inhibit contraction. NO may also be used to inhibit sympathetic outflow, lessen the release of norepinephrine, cause
20 vasodilation, decrease heart rate and decrease contractility. In the SA node, cholinergic stimulation leads to formation of NO.

Other drugs, drug formulations and/or drug compositions that may be used according to this invention may include any naturally occurring or chemically synthesized sodium channel blocker. Sodium channel blockers are
25 also known as sodium channel inhibitors, sodium channel blocking agents, rapid channel blockers or rapid channel inhibitors. Antiarrhythmic agents that inhibit or block the sodium channel are known as class I antiarrhythmics, examples include, but are not limited to, quinidine and quinidine-like agents, lidocaine and lidocaine-like agents, tetrodotoxin, encainide, flecainide and combinations,
30 mixtures and/or salts thereof. Therefore, the term "sodium channel blocker"

appearing herein may refer to one or more agents that inhibit or block the flow of sodium ions across a cell membrane or remove the potential difference across a cell membrane. For example, the sodium channel may also be totally inhibited
5 by increasing the extracellular potassium levels to depolarizing hyperkalemic values, which remove the potential difference across the cell membrane. The result is inhibition of cardiac contraction with cardiac arrest (cardioplegia). The opening of the sodium channel (influx of sodium) is for swift conduction of the electrical impulse throughout the heart.

10 Other drugs, drug formulations and/or drug compositions that may be used according to this invention may include any naturally occurring or chemically synthesized potassium channel agent. The term "potassium channel agent " appearing herein may refer to one or more agents that impact the flow of potassium ions across the cell membrane. There are two major types of
15 potassium channels. The first type of channel is voltage-gated and the second type is ligand-gated. Acetylcholine-activated potassium channels, which are ligand-gated channels, open in response to vagal stimulation and the release of acetylcholine. Opening of the potassium channel causes hyperpolarization, which decreases the rate at which the activation threshold is reached.

20 Adenosine is one example of a potassium channel opener. Adenosine slows conduction through the AV node. Adenosine, a breakdown product of adenosine triphosphate, inhibits the AV node and atria. In atrial tissue, adenosine causes the shortening of the action potential duration and causes hyperpolarization. In the AV node, adenosine has similar effects and also decreases the action
25 potential amplitude and the rate of increase of the action potential. Adenosine is also a direct vasodilator by its actions on the adenosine receptor on vascular smooth muscle cells. In addition, adenosine acts as a negative neuromodulator, thereby inhibiting release of norepinephrine. Class III antiarrhythmic agents also known as potassium channel inhibitors lengthen the action potential duration and

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refractoriness by blocking the outward potassium channel to prolong the action potential. Amiodarone and d-sotalol are both examples of class III antiarrhythmic agents.

5 Potassium is the most common component in cardioplegic solutions. High extracellular potassium levels reduce the membrane resting potential. Opening of the sodium channel, which normally allows rapid sodium influx during the upstroke of the action potential, is therefore inactivated because of a reduction in the membrane resting potential. The present invention may be combined with
10 conventional CPB. Alternatively, the induced asystole as described by this invention may serve as a substitute for conventional cardioplegic arrest. For example, the combination of drugs and vagal stimulation may be used as a cardioplegic agent in a variety of medical procedures.

Drugs, drug formulations and/or drug compositions that may be used
15 according to this invention may comprise one or more of any naturally occurring or chemically synthesized beta-blocker, cholinergic agent, cholinesterase inhibitor, calcium channel blocker, sodium channel blocker, potassium channel agent, adenosine, adenosine receptor agonist, adenosine deaminase inhibitor, dipyridamole, monoamine oxidase inhibitor, digoxin, digitalis, lignocaine,
20 bradykinin agents, serotonergic agonist, antiarrhythmic agents, cardiac glycosides, local anesthetics and combinations or mixtures thereof. Digitalis and digoxin both inhibit the sodium pump. Digitalis is a natural inotrope derived from plant material, while digoxin is a synthesized inotrope. Dipyridamole inhibits adenosine deaminase, which breaks down adenosine. Drugs, drug formulations
25 and/or drug compositions capable of reversibly suppressing autonomous electrical conduction at the SA and/or AV node, while still allowing the heart to be electrically paced to maintain cardiac output may be used according to this invention.

In one embodiment, the cardiac asystole produced in accordance with the present invention is reversible, e.g., chemically such as by the administration of atropine or by natural forces. Beta-adrenergic stimulation or administration of calcium solutions may be used to reverse the effects of a calcium channel blocker such as verapamil. Agents that promote heart rate and/or contraction may be used in a preferred embodiment of the present invention. For example, dopamine, a natural catecholamine, is known to increase contractility. Positive inotropes are agents that specifically increase the force of contraction of the heart. Glucagon, a naturally occurring hormone, is known to increase heart rate and contractility. Glucagon may be used to reverse the effects of a beta-blocker since its effects bypass the beta receptor. Forskolin is known to increase heart rate and contractility. As mentioned earlier, epinephrine and norepinephrine naturally increase heart rate and contractility. Thyroid hormone, phosphodiesterase inhibitors and prostacyclin, a prostaglandin, are also known to increase heart rate and contractility. In addition, methylxanthines are known to prevent adenosine from interacting with its cell receptors.

Typically, vagal nerve stimulation prevents the heart from contracting. This non-contraction must then be followed by periods without vagal nerve stimulation during which the heart is allowed to contract, and blood flow is restored throughout the body. At **517**, the sensor **6** may be checked to determine if an escape beat is imminent. The sensor may be checked periodically during the procedure, for example, as shown at **517**. Alternatively, the sensor may interrupt the procedure at any point by indicating that an escape beat is imminent. For example, a visual and/or audible signal, such as a flashing light or beeping tone, may be used to alert a surgeon that an escape beat is imminent. If no contraction is imminent, then all or a portion of the medical procedure may be carried out (Block **520**). However, if a contraction is imminent, then a signal may indicate an escape beat is about to occur (as seen at **523**). If the sensor indicates an escape beat is imminent, the surgeon may stop the

medical procedure to allow the beat to occur. In one embodiment, the surgeon may then proceed to Block **530**, where the nerve stimulation is ceased and the heart is allowed to contract. Alternatively, unit **200** may automatically proceed to

5 Block **530** to cease nerve stimulation when sensor **6** indicates that a beat is imminent.

The output of sensor **6** may be communicated to the surgeon by a number of suitable means. For example, the output may be indicated on a display or monitor. A visual or audio signal may indicate when the electrical signals from

10 the heart reach a certain level, e.g. a level indicating an imminent escape beat. Alternatively, the system of the present invention may "lock" the controls of the vagal stimulator in an "off" state when an escape beat is sensed. Alternatively, the system of the present invention may "lock" the controls of the surgical instruments being used to perform the surgery to indicate to the surgeon that an

15 escape beat is imminent. The system may then release the controls when the signals indicate that the heart is again appropriately stilled.

Additionally, the amount of vagal nerve stimulation used and/or the amount of drugs administered may be adjusted based on the output of the sensor **6**. For example, the level of stimulation may be increased if sensor **6**

20 indicates that too many escape beats are occurring or are likely to occur. This adjustment may be automatic or may be controlled by the surgeon.

At Block **520**, a medical procedure may be performed or begun. Such a procedure may be for example surgery on the heart. Alternatively, the procedure may be surgery performed on another organ of the body. At Block **520**, one or

25 more of a variety of pharmacological agents or drugs may be delivered or may continue to be delivered. These drugs may produce reversible asystole of a heart while maintaining the ability of the heart to be electrically paced. Other drugs may be administered for a variety of functions and purposes as described above.

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The term "medical procedure" may mean any one or more medical or surgical procedures such as, for example cardiac surgery, performed with or without cardiopulmonary bypass (CPB) circuits, heart valve repair, heart valve replacement, MAZE procedures, revascularization procedures, transmyocardial revascularization (TMR) procedures, percutaneous myocardial revascularization (PMR) procedures, CABG procedures, anastomosis procedures, non-surgical procedures, fluoroscopic procedures, beating heart surgery, vascular surgery, neurosurgery, brain surgery, electrophysiology procedures, diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, ablation procedures, ablation of arrhythmias, endovascular procedures, treatment of the liver, spleen, heart, lungs, and major blood vessels, aneurysm repair, imaging procedures of the heart and great vessels, CAT scans or MRI procedures, pharmacological therapies, drug delivery procedures, gene therapies, cellular therapies, cancer therapies, radiation therapies, genetic, cellular, tissue and/or organ manipulation or transplantation procedures, coronary angioplasty procedures, placement or delivery of coated or noncoated stents, atherectomy procedures, atherosclerotic plaque manipulation and/or removal procedures, procedures where bleeding needs to be precisely controlled, procedures that require precise control of cardiac motion and/or bleeding.

When the medical procedure comprises one or more medical devices, e.g., coated stents, these devices may be coated with one or more radioactive materials and/or biological agents such as, for example, an anticoagulant agent, an antithrombotic agent, a clotting agent, a platelet agent, an anti-inflammatory agent, an antibody, an antigen, an immunoglobulin, a defense agent, an enzyme, a hormone, a growth factor, a neurotransmitter, a cytokine, a blood agent, a regulatory agent, a transport agent, a fibrous agent, a protein, a peptide, a proteoglycan, a toxin, an antibiotic agent, an antibacterial agent, an antimicrobial agent, a bacterial agent or component, hyaluronic acid, a polysaccharide, a carbohydrate, a fatty acid, a catalyst, a drug, a vitamin,

a DNA segment, a RNA segment, a nucleic acid, a lectin, an antiviral agent, a viral agent or component, a genetic agent, a ligand and a dye (which acts as a biological ligand). Biological agents may be found in nature (naturally
5 occurring) or may be chemically synthesized.

The medical procedure may be non-invasive, minimally invasive and/or invasive. The medical procedure may entail a port-access approach, a partial or total endoscopic approach, a sternotomy approach or a thoracotomy approach. The medical procedure may include the use of various mechanical stabilization
10 devices or techniques as well as various robotic or imaging systems.

In one method, the heart may be temporarily slowed or intermittently stopped for short periods of time to permit the surgeon to accomplish the required surgical task and yet still allow the heart itself to supply blood circulation to the body. For example, stimulation of the vagus nerve in order to temporarily
15 and intermittently slow or stop the heart is described in U.S. Patent No. 6,006,134 entitled "Method and Device for Electronically Controlling the Beating of a Heart Using Venous Electrical Stimulation of Nerve Fibers," December 21, 1999, to inventors Hill and Junkman. This patent is assigned to Medtronic, Inc. and is incorporated herein by reference.

20 During this medical procedure, cardiac contractions or cardiac signals may be monitored constantly or intermittently as described above. An assessment of the likelihood of a contraction may again be taken at Block **525**. If no contraction is imminent, the physician may continue with the medical procedure that is in progress. However, if a contraction is likely to occur, the surgeon may increase
25 nerve stimulation and/or the administration of drugs. Alternatively, the surgeon may choose to proceed to Block **530** and allow the heart to beat normally for a period of time. The heart will therefore be allowed to contract and thus blood will again be allowed to flow to the brain and vital organs.

After a time, the medical procedure or one phase of the procedure is completed at **520**. After some phase of the medical procedure is performed, cardiac contractions are allowed to occur (Block **530**). Cardiac contractions may
5 need to occur intermittently during the procedure to ensure adequate blood flow. In one embodiment, the stimulation from the nerve stimulator **10** is stopped or slowed enough to allow the heart to contract. For example, the vagal nerve stimulation is removed, thereby allowing cardiac contractions to occur.

In another embodiment, it may be determined if the heart is contracting as
10 desired (**532**). If appropriate, the heart may be stimulated to ensure that cardiac contractions occur (Block **535**). For example, cardiac stimulator **20** may be used to apply pacing pulses to the heart to encourage the heart to contract normally. In particular, the pacing pulses may be applied to the ventricle as is well known in the field. Additionally, the amount of cardiac stimulation used may be adjusted
15 based on the output of the sensor **6**. For example, the level of stimulation may be decreased or the duration of stimulation may be decreased if the sensor **6** indicates that too many escape beats are occurring or are likely to occur at such a level of stimulation.

The present invention permits the heart to be stilled or quiescent for
20 selected and controllable periods of time in order to permit a medical procedure to be performed. While such a period of quiescence is desired, it must not last too long, otherwise insufficient blood and oxygen is delivered to organs. Thus, it is necessary to have the periods when the heart is beating (Blocks **530**, **535**). At Blocks **530**, **535**, one or more of a variety of pharmacological agents or drugs
25 may be delivered or may continue to be delivered. These drugs may produce reversible asystole of a heart while maintaining the ability of the heart to be electrically paced. Particularly at Blocks **530**, **535**, drugs may be administered to encourage heart contractions. Other drugs may be administered for a variety of functions and purposes as described above

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Sensor **6** may also be used to determine whether the heart is beating as desired at Block **532**. Such output may be communicated to the surgeon by a number of suitable means. For example, the output may be indicated on a display or monitor. A visual or audio signal may also indicate output. Alternatively, the system of the present invention may "lock" the controls of the cardiac stimulator in an "on" state after an escape beat has occurred in order to return the heart to a normal rate. Alternatively, the system of the present invention may "lock" the controls of the cardiac stimulator in an "off" state to prevent an escape beat. The system may then release the controls when the electrical signals sensed by the sensor are again as desired.

At **539**, it may be determined if additional medical procedures or additional stages of medical procedures need to be performed. If so, the heart may again be stilled using the methods of stilling the heart described above. The method may then be repeated (as in the loop designated by **540**). For example, the heart may again be prevented from contracting by stimulation of the vagal nerve (**510**). Additional drugs may be delivered or the drugs previously administered may continue to be administered.

This cycle may be repeated until the procedure, such as surgery, is completed. As the cycle continues, sensor **6** enables monitoring of heart rate and, if necessary, appropriate adjustment of nerve stimulation and cardiac stimulation to ensure the heart is beating appropriately.

For example, a surgical procedure at **520** may require several stitches to be made by the surgeon. The surgeon may stimulate the vagal nerve at **510** to stop the heart. Then the surgeon may make the first stitch at **520**. The surgeon may then reduce or halt stimulation at **530** and allow the heart to contract. The surgeon may also pace the heart at **535**. Then at **540**, the surgeon may return to **510** to inhibit contractions of the heart. At **520**, the surgeon will then make the second stitch. This process may be repeated (the loop designated by **540** may be repeated) until all the required stitches have been made. Meanwhile, the

heart's electrical signals are monitored continuously or, for example at Blocks **517**, **525** by sensor **6**. The procedure may proceed uninterrupted if no contractions are imminent.

5 After the procedure is completed, step **535** may be performed until the heart is beating normally. Once it has been determined at **539** that the medical procedure is complete, the surgeon may continue stimulating the heart until satisfied that the heart is beating normally. Additionally, sensor **6** may be used to monitor heart rate until it has reached an acceptable level. At the procedure's
10 end, one or more of a variety of pharmacological agents or drugs may be delivered or may continue to be delivered for example to alleviate pain or aid in recuperation. Other drugs may be administered for a variety of functions and purposes as described above.

FIG. 4 is a timeline illustrating one relationship between a cardiac
15 contraction sensor, a nerve stimulator and a cardiac stimulator.

 Point **610** indicates a point before the medical procedure has begun. At this point **610**, both nerve stimulation and cardiac stimulation are off. At point **610**, the heart is beating regularly. The patient's heart rate may be measured by sensor **6** at point **610**. Thus, sensor **6** may be turned on at point **610**.

20 Then nerve stimulation is turned on to inhibit beating of the heart. During phase **601**, the vagal nerve stimulation is on and the cardiac stimulation is off. This is the condition of the two types of stimulation at step **520** described above. In one embodiment, as shown in **FIG. 4**, cardiac contraction sensor **6** is on throughout the entire procedure. Alternatively, cardiac contraction sensor **6** may
25 be turned on during phase **601** to check whether a contraction is imminent (as described at Block **517**).

Point **611** is a representative point during phase **601**. At point **611**, the contractions of the heart are stilled or substantially slowed. In addition, at point **611**, sensor **6** may be used to determine that no contractions are imminent
5 (as described at Blocks **517** and **525**). If no contractions are impending at point **611**, then the medical procedure can proceed (as described at Block **520**). However, if a contraction is impending at point **611**, sensor **6** may provide a signal indicating the impending contraction. The surgeon may then stop the medical procedure and allow the contraction to occur. After the contraction has
10 occurred, the surgeon may then continue in phase **601** and finish the step of the procedure. Alternatively, the surgeon may proceed immediately to phase **602** after the contraction has occurred. Alternatively, control unit **200** may automatically proceed to phase **602** after providing the signal.

During phase **602** the vagal stimulation is turned off (as described at
15 step **530**) and the cardiac stimulation may be turned on (as described at **535**). Point **612** is a representative point during phase **602**. At point **612**, the contractions are allowed and/or may be induced. In one embodiment, cardiac contraction sensor **6** is still on during phase **602** and may be used to determine if the contractions are occurring appropriately. Alternatively, the sensor **6** may be
20 turned on during phase **602** to determine if the contractions are occurring appropriately.

During phase **603**, the vagal nerve stimulation is again turned on and the cardiac stimulation is turned off. In one embodiment, the cardiac contraction sensor **6** has been operating throughout each phase and continues to operate
25 through phase **603**. The amount or duration of vagal stimulation during phase **603** may be different than the amount or duration of vagal stimulation during phase **601**, based on the data gathered from sensor **6** during phase **601**. For example, the vagal stimulation may be increased if sensor **6** detected an undesirable number of escape beats. Alternatively, sensor **6** may be turned on
30 during phase **603** to again determine if an escape beat is imminent (as described

at Block **525**). Point **613** is a representative point during phase **603**. If no escape beat is imminent at **613**, then the medical procedure can proceed (as described in step **520**). However, if an escape beat is impending, sensor **6**
5 may provide a signal indicating this. The surgeon may then stop the medical procedure and allow the contraction to occur. After the contraction has occurred, the surgeon may then continue in phase **603** and finish the step of the procedure. Alternatively, the surgeon may proceed immediately to phase **604** after the contraction has occurred. Alternatively, control unit **200** may automatically
10 proceed to phase **604** after providing the signal.

During phase **604** the vagal stimulation is again turned off and the cardiac stimulation may again be turned on. The amount or duration of cardiac stimulation during phase **604** may be different than the amount or duration of cardiac stimulation during phase **602**, based on the data gathered from sensor **6**
15 during the previous phases. For example, the amount or duration of cardiac stimulation may be decreased if too many escape beats occurred during the previous phases. Point **614** is a representative point during phase **602**. At point **614**, the contractions are allowed and/or may be induced. In one embodiment, cardiac contraction sensor **6** is still on during phase **604** and may be used to
20 determine if the contractions are occurring appropriately. Alternatively, the sensor **6** may be turned on during phase **604** to determine if the contractions are occurring appropriately.

The method of the present invention may be repeated as necessary until a point is reached, represented by point **615**, when the necessary medical
25 procedures are completed. At this point **615**, nerve stimulation is off although cardiac stimulation may be left on in order to pace the heart to its normal rhythm. At point **615**, sensor **6** may be used to check the heart rate for a final time (as described at **532**).

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that while the invention has been described above in connection with particular embodiments and examples, the invention is not necessarily so limited, and that numerous other

5 embodiments, examples, uses, modifications and departures from the
embodiments, examples and uses are intended to be encompassed by the
claims attached hereto. The entire disclosure of each patent and publication
cited herein is incorporated by reference, as if each such patent or publication
were individually incorporated by reference herein.

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